

## Water Glass Refractions

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# Water Glass Refractions

by [theblitz](#)

## Summary

It's been years since the Fold disintegrated and Alina fell quietly into obscurity; giving up her name to martyrdom and returning to her childhood home in southern Ravka.

Now left to quiet days, this time of reflection paints events in a different light. As do her dreams of the Darkling.

Who you were is not always who you are.

## Notes

AN: I have not read the books (none of 'em), only the wiki pages and excerpts on social media sites, as well as watching the Netflix series. Any inaccuracies or odd characterizations are my own! I just wanted to follow the spirit of an idea that came to me while brushing my teeth, even if it battled with canon. Thank you so much for reading :) Any comments set my heart ablaze

When it first began she thought he was a shadow in her mind; a remnant of the time spent running towards and away from him. Tricks played by her own dreamscape, whether it be out of fear or boredom.

The time spent in Keramzin was more monotonous than Alina had ever anticipated. Day bled into night, and then back into day again. The work was hard, but never challenging. The days were long, but the rewarding feeling she had anticipated never came. She was surrounded by charming children and Mal, who was overflowing with kindness, but compared to her time of adventuring and being a force for good... it felt easier. Which was of course what she had wanted... at the beginning.

Now each time a new face appeared at their gate, Alina would hope that they could bring forth the sense of adventure she now longed for. It was more like an addition to the same though. Over time the old battle scars had turned white; reminders Alina could only wish for more of.

In the fallout of the war, she and Mal had taken on new names. Plain, common ones that would draw no attention to them. After so much running, when all she had wanted was a chance to rest, pretending to be a martyr and a victim of the same fallout as the Darkling seemed like a good idea. She and Mal could be free of the responsibilities tying them down. Looking back, it made her feel naive.

Alina was now separate from the political sphere of Ravka, but after all the time spent with the Darkling and Nikolai, she was well aware of all the work required to manage any large group. Despite all the best efforts of her friends though, there were still problems. Some were new, the kind of routine political machinations. Other issues though were the longstanding sort which had plagued the social structures- like poverty or lack of education. Alina knew of one issue which seemed to slip the mind of many others-- the Grisha.

The public perception and prejudice was rooted deep. Now with little consequence, the practice of trading Grisha along the border seemed to run more rampant. Being in the south, Alina knew there were children and adults alike falling into the hands of slave traders. These human beings were being sold off to the Shu Han for no other reason than their abilities. When she lingered on the thought too long, an immense wave of guilt would sweep over her. The inaction taken when she was the Sun Summoner and the inaction she took now in the present out of a self serving fear was a wicked double-edged blade.

At the time, the effort to find the amplifiers and control her powers had felt like too much. It was such a big ask that Alina wished to toss away. But now, with three years between the time watching the Fold disintegrate and watching a bucket fill for washing, she felt emptier. Her powers and status were gone. All she had now was a house full of children and Mal.

She loved him. She had loved Mal for years and knew she would love him for many more, but to put all her time, worth, and energy into one person felt more hollow than she had ever expected. Those days of daydreaming and wishing he would look at her with the same adoration he seemed to throw at every other girl were not so far away. She had earned every look and touch now though, by his goodness. The days passed much like the tide now though-- the future quickly rushed in to take its place.

So she was left doing dishes hoping this would not be all there was to life. She could not have lived it all in the beginning only to teter out quietly, like a good horse worked too hard. Put out to pasture just to enjoy the days of sunshine and not much else. When this exact thought came to mind, Alina would flinch. One day she hoped to be capable of laughing at the cruel irony.

Every night, after reminding one another of their true names, Mal and she would drift off to sleep. She would usually dream of days past, spinning various scenarios of what-ifs. Alina would fall back into those happy moments between all the running, when she and Mal could just fall into one another. The days spent at the Little Palace with her friends, before everything fell apart. She dreamt of having her Grisha powers again. A presence in her heart that was familiar, but unobtrusive. Like a cat lounging at her feet, but instead it was nestled warmly in her ribcage. It was a bittersweet, but Alina appreciated the time nonetheless.

One evening in spring her mind was only capable of crafting the Darkling. There had been flashes of him in her dreams over the years, but it was like he was just in the corner of her eye. Enough to serve as a reminder of the man she had once known, but not enough to construct him as whole. It was odd considering how often he would cross her mind during waking hours.

She found herself coming across the same ageless figure she remembered, though without the scars she had last seen him with. He stood standstill, hands behind his back. Even his chest did not rise to simulate breathing. It was like coming across a statue in the garden, where so much living surrounded the unmoving.

It seemed in her dreams, Alina had crafted a shadow of the man she knew. It was odd, but pleasant to finally pin down the man-- even if just in her dreams. Despite all the pain he had wrought, the years between then and now gave Alina the space to understand him better. She did not forgive him, but being older and having so many young people to take care of did put things into perspective. She now understood how having a few hundred years more likely altered his perspective, taking away the blind faith Alina once had.

So on the first night, she just examined him. In a space of dueling dark and light with no end, she moved around him again and again. She was no creature on the prowl, but more like a designer seeking out perfection. Was his black coat the same shade? Did the buttons match? Was there the same sharpness in the curve of his jaw?

She circled him in scrutiny for what felt like hours, inching closer with each pass. Though she refused to touch him, there was a humanness to him that Alina had failed to notice until he was laid dead in her arms. The gift of hindsight made the characteristic glaring. Even while stiff, the weight of a lonely life was obviously carried. It nudged wordlessly at the corner of his stilled lips and caused his shoulders to slouch forward just the slightest bit.

Alina found enjoyment in looking upon the villain of her past. He was not so scary now. In fact, she sometimes wondered if he was the closest she ever had to a comrade. No matter how much she cared for Mal, he could never understand the hole in her chest. The Darkling may have lusted after her power, but he had understood its gracious immensity in a way no one else could even begin too. Even Baghra had seemed separate, despite having centuries and immense power. The woman seemed to want the same ability to control Alina, but had to time or interest in the girl herself.

She saw parts of Baghra in the man before her, but the one place she dared not look closely was his eyes. No matter the scenario, even a statue of Aleksander would see through her. The dream was spent instead in intense study, not flaws in her creation to be found.

When she awoke, Mal was already up and readied for the day. He did not seem to notice a change, though Alina felt one in herself. As she moved through the house, following her routine, the monotony seemed more taxing on her than previously. The shrill of voices through walls and train of dirty clothes scattered across floors were not small charms of the living, but small annoyances stacked one on top of the other. Picking up the laundry, she sighed.

The world felt heavier now, and the only change she could pinpoint was seeing the Darkling. He was not a figure of fear for her. Seeing him instead dug up resentments Alina had tried so hard to bury. Just small bits of everyday life, but he was a reminder of what had once been. Who Alina once was. She had gone on and thought she had moved on by being human.

The thoughts plagued her, even as she finished the day. Even as she looked at Mal's bright smile and the children were on their best behaviour. No, even the edge of satisfaction could not cut through the cloud hanging over her.

The night could not come fast enough and by the time she cooked up dinner, Alina was begging her subconscious for another opportunity to see the Darkling and maybe even wield her powers. She had some occasions to move through the exercises, down in the fields and it would inevitably make her feel closer. There was never the same weight in her palms, but it was as close as she could get. Nothing else in life could compare to the power, but maybe her dreams would let her reach closer than before.

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That evening she turned away from Mal, shrugging off his arm when he tried to cuddle. "It's just too hot," she reassured him, though her heart was plagued with guilt. Thinking about what-could-have-been all day was a tempting trap, but doing so while Mal in all his goodness laid next to her made her feel dirty. They both had given up things to be here, to be together. Why now did it feel like it was not enough?

So she laid on the other side of the bed, allowing the inches to stretch into miles. This felt right, allowing the kernel of pride and regret to fester unquestioned so Alina could chase make-believe in her dreams. Just this *once* she could run after it with abandon.

Falling slowly into sleep, she did indeed dream of the Darkling again. He looked exactly the same as before; all sharp angles and a surety Alina had not seen in another person since. Again she did not speak, instead circling him. But rather than a studious examination of the figure before her, she moved her hand in a whole manner of ways to call upon the light.

Their surroundings had formed something more solid than the previous night, now resembling the war room in the Little Palace. All dark wood surfaces with a crackling fire across the room from them. The warm feeling from years past now bloomed in her chest. It was likely caused by seeing her lights interact with the world around. Here the light bounced off corners, created shadow and reflected in the glass lamps on the walls. It reminded Alina of the brief shining moment when she and Aleksander stood in this very room in the middle of the night. When there was so much outside of them and she could still imagine being a part of the Grisha.

Returning to the moment at hand, she became familiar again with what wielding light meant. The movements which called a force into action. The ball of light crafted moved airily through the room, following the path Alina would make for it. Though her mind turned to the more tactical applications of her work, such as the cut and bending of light to be invisible, those gifts only reminded her of the war fought. Her dreams were meant to live out fantasies- despite the company.

And so it went. Alina would awaken each morning in a small room with her husband Mal and spend the day waiting for sleep again. Her longing was mostly for the familiar rays of light emanating from her, but there was a certain anticipation for Aleksander. So far as she knew, the figure had not moved or spoken. He would just stand, arms behind his back, eyes staring off into the distance. There had been gardens, palace hallways, the bridge of Nikolai's ship, and even the Fold itself. All were desolate though, unnervingly quiet, and Aleksander had stood as still as a statue every time. Alina did not wholly understand the strange consistency in her dreams now, but she did know the dread simmering; waiting for her waking hours and the widening emptiness growing within.

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The nights came and went, collecting together into weeks.

Three weeks had passed before Mal questioned her. They sat across from each other on the edge of bed, Alina staring into darkness just beyond the candlelight.

He thought she was more quiet and distant. He was right, but all Alina could think was why had it taken so long for him to notice. An unfair assessment, but the dreams had put something within her. A twisted longing, making her more selfish. And she had no interest in feeling guilty anymore.

So she spoke honestly, unearthing the thoughts that had clung on through the years. Laid out was how she understood the world requiring balance, but the means by which she had lost her powers felt like a gaping hole. When she tried to explain her feelings relating to the lack of Grisha abilities she now had, all Mal could do was give a lingering hug and suggest a letter to Genya. He promised to try spending more time with her. That maybe once the harvest was in, Alina could offer to host her friend and find a way to fill the gap.

The statement was so plain, and ultimately flummoxing, Alina was left speechless. Until, that is, she began an argument over him not understanding. It was not simply her loneliness in the physical world, but the additional emptiness inside. Now that they had saved Ravka, all that was left was to play dead and live out a simple life that she had never really dreamed of. Alina had been a leader. She had been good at it. Now all she could do was bide her time, trying and failing to find anything that was half as rewarding as being a Grisha.

Hearing this, an anger overcame Mal. It twisted his handsome face into something ugly, and Alina was sure the anger was reflected in her. She sensed it in clenched fists and the crook of her jaw. She wanted a fight. But Mal was clearly the more sensible of the two right now, stepping back towards their bedroom door.

“Alina, I don’t know where this is coming from, but it is clear that you need space to work through this.” With that Mal left to sleep in the library. Alina still did not budge though. For too long this had been bubbling, and now with a pseudo-outlet for her disappointments, regrets, and dreams, she was not keen on returning to the status quo. To be trapped here in Keramzin was not a happy ending anymore. Alina turned to blow out the candle, darkness engulfing the room, and settled on to bed. That night she fell asleep alone. But it did not feel lonely.

Just like every night for the last few weeks, Alina found herself in a space without the sense of time that hung around her everywhere else. The same statuesque figure stood, though this time it was in the cathedral-- a new addition to their rotation of settings. When she caught the gaze of Aleksander's quartz grey eyes, she had no interest in looking away. It was decided then-- no longer would the silence be enough. With each step she took forward and closer, she hoped that her subconscious could give this figment enough depth to help her come to a conclusion.

“I understand what you meant about being alone now.” Alina spoke the space for the first time, though her words came out on a delay. It seemed her mouth moved, but it was not until



seconds later the sound of her voice would finally reach her ears. She waited for a response, but silence stretched on and Aleksander's expression did not change. Not a single hair altered from what she'd dreamt over the last few weeks. Though this version the Darkling may not have been able to emulate the man she once knew, this seemed like the only place to air her grievances. "Now that I am without the ability to call the sun, I feel more isolated than ever before."

Alina fiddled with her fingers, but maintained eye contact. "To have all of what I worked for pulled out from under me as a reward for saving them feels wildly unfair. And the world is not fair, and there may be more sun summoners, but none will ever understand what I did. No one could." Each step taken only brought her closer to the figure who was ominous, but did not carry the same threat as he once did. All these weeks of silence, he was merely Aleksander. Someone who wanted to possess her power, control Ravka, and better the world for Grisha. He seemed so obtuse now.

His failures lay at the feet of himself, but Alina felt a sense of responsibility in how easily she turned away from the Grishas' struggles. How she was able to pick and choose, making decisions about leaving public life without considering the long term consequences. Nikolai and Zoya may have the best of intentions, but a few years could not change centuries of prejudice. The experiments in Shu Han. The torture in Ferdja. The same things she had heard of as a child, and in the army. The horrible stories that swirled through the Little Palace.

There may have been fear spread to gain control, but she could now see a deep desire to protect. Aleksander said it to her so many times. He said it plainly and it had stirred something within Alina. Something she may have followed through on, if not for being temporarily blinded by the actions perpetrated against her. Those hurt feelings convinced her to make her world smaller, to not see the wide picture of it all. Aleksander may have been wrong in his actions, but then so was she.

"I'm sorry I could not see beyond myself, but then I think in the end, neither could you." Alina reached up and held Aleksander's cheek. She could not continue to live like this; pretending to be happy without. Pretending the blissful nature of ignorance would comfort her in the years to come. To be ready to settle in the past, dropping away all she could be and a future in the unknown.

His eyes moved from staring in the great beyond, to look down at her and it was as if the world tilted. There was a statue no more, but a dynamic figure. And he smiled. Alina felt the rise of his cheek, reassuring her-- even in this dreamstate-- that it was not the trick of the light.

“You are not alone. Not for much longer. We shall meet again and have another try. Eternity gives us time to find forgiveness and understanding, Alina.”

She suddenly understood that no matter the stipulations, this moment was real. It was as if the world then overcorrected, tilting again. Alina stumbled away, her hand falling back to her side. This was no dream, but another example of the power he possessed and the weaving of magic holding together everything they did. The two were together in much the same way they had joined across space and time before. There was fear, knowing the power necessary to make something like this happen, but there was a sliver of joy.

If Aleksander still had all that potential brewing, just waiting for the right circumstances, Alina must have some too. Maybe she need not be so despondent to losing her sun summoner abilities. She was just as worthy of harnessing the potential in the world. Just because she had made a decision at eighteen did not mean it was forever. Her eyes had initially dropped away to the floor in her stumbling, but now she brought them back to meet his. There was no good and right way for the events to unfold, but neither had there been a good or right way with the merzost.

As she got older and reflected, Alina was starting to see that sometimes there was not ultimate good and no determinable right. All one could do was try their best with what they knew. Now she knew more than before and she wanted to make the world a better place. Looking into those eyes, Alina knew what needed to be the next step.

She closed her eyes gently, taking a deep breath. Footsteps cut through the eerie silence, but Alina made no movement. As Aleksander closed the space between them, she almost expected him to creak-- like an old house. Each step was sure though. When stopping just inches away, Alina did not open her eyes. She needed to be sure of her choices, of her words.

A hand slowly slipped into her's, fingers curling around her palm and a thumb gently rubbing the back. This could be a manipulation, but Alina felt above those things now. The honey words were all used up, but her loneliness was not. He was well aware, with all the hours spent together. But she knew him too, and understood the loneliness in her was present in him; just like a mirror. These nights spent staring at him, Alina came to understand she had reawoken the loneliness within him. Reminded him there was potential to be less fragile than the centuries of frigid solitude he had experienced. Aleksander may have had forever, but he was not above time.

“Thank you,” slipped out, lingering in the delay.

All that was left to wonder was whether or not this was her forever too. And with that, eyes closed, heart steady, Alina willed herself to wake up.

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